

An American's Dilemma

WE live in a century which has already promoted some of the greatest totalitarianisms in history; its remaining decades will possibly promote even bigger ones. Unless something drastic should happen, that is a certainty, and one of these is already preparing for such a future: the Catholic Church. Economic and social tornadoes have produced theirs, of which Soviet Russia is the most phenomenally successful. Between these two there stands democracy. This book* sets out to examine which totalitarianism is most to be feared and by which democracy is most imperilled. The author looks at the Vatican and at Communism, draws a parallel between them, then compares them with democracy—or, rather, to American democracy—and finally seems to conclude that of the two totalitarianisms Soviet Russia is the more dangerous.

That Soviet Russia and Communism to many are fearsome realities, to be promptly combated and possibly destroyed, is a fact; that the Catholic Church to many is also a fearsome reality, to be combated and curbed, although not necessarily destroyed, is also a fact. It is a fact too, however, that for many the urgency of global political problems, the crude game of power-politics screened behind the ugly apparel of ideological odium, not to mention the resurgence of the vast Asiatic continent—which is attributed to Communist machinations, although, by the simplest law of political evolution, it would have occurred even if Communism had never existed—obscure rather than help to gauge from which quarter there is the greatest danger. The greatest danger is not necessarily the most immediate. The awareness of being about to fall into a ditch might prompt one honestly to believe that the ditch is more fearsome than a deep well half a mile away. It is human and understandable, particularly if one is convinced of being faced with imminent peril. Yet it is regrettable that, while indicting two enemies of democracy, the author should succumb to the temptation to pronounce one more dangerous than the other, simply because to him it seems to be the more immediate.

Whether Communism is more dangerous than Catholicism is anyone's opinion. This, however, should not lead to the under-estimation of the danger of Catholicism, even when examined *per se*. And that is where Mr. Blanshard seems to fail. For, while his analogy of

the structural similarity of the Vatican and the Kremlin is objective enough to prove a striking resemblance in the ideological, hierarchical, and administrative machineries of both, yet the scales seem always to be weighted against the Kremlin. "(Communism) . . . is a fanatical religion with commissars instead of priests and Stalin as Pope," he says. And with this many will agree. When, however, parallels are drawn between the Catholic Church and Communism in the following sweeping manner,

"In the Holy Trinity of the Kremlin theology, Marx stands for God, Lenin for Christ, and Stalin for the Holy Ghost,"

or,

"Stalin, as the surviving member of the Communist trinity, is treated as a living God,"

then the author weakens his case very considerably. For this is over-simplification, to say the least. It is misleading. It is unfair both to Communism and to Catholicism, and, above all, to the reader, who loves neither but is anxious to have a fair comparison.

The fabric of the two systems is thoroughly, diligently, efficiently, and objectively scrutinized. The author's knowledge of Catholicism is remarkable; his exposure of the spirit animating it is even more so. None the less, a kind of ever-present and all-powerful subconscious fear complex—"but there is a far greater danger than this"—seems continually to be bedeviling his conclusions. Here again the immediateness of such a danger might be a reality which many cannot understand, although admittedly the sense of the immediateness of such a danger is shared by a great number in the West and by an ever greater number in the United States. Yet, when such a fear complex becomes a cause for obscuring the positive peril of Catholicism, then the book's claim to be an impartial indictment of two enemies of democracy cannot be accepted at its full value. For there are times when Catholicism in these pages emerges almost as friendly disposed towards democracy, which Mr. Blanshard, more than anyone else, should know to be untrue. And this unfortunate impression is by no means dispelled when finally the author, after having soft-pedalled his attack on Catholicism, calls for "an honourable peace with Vatican power."

The strategy of using an enemy to destroy a greater one has been employed before, the strange bedfellowship of the U.S.A. and Soviet Russia during the Second World War being the most recent example. The Catholic Church is con-

* *Communism, Democracy, and Catholic Power*, by Paul Blanshard. (Beacon Press, Boston.) 340 pp.; \$3.50.

sidered, even by most active anti-Catholics, as one of the most powerful allies of the U.S. and of the West in their fight against Communism—which is correct. But does that make her more friendly inclined towards genuine freedom? Has her support, given so generously to the American anti-Communist crusade, truly helped the maintenance of the real democracy enshrined in the American Constitution? Is it mere coincidence that un-American Committees, the F.B.I., and the witch-hunt are Catholic-dominated? The equivalent of un-American committees has preceded the rise of Fascism and of Nazism in Italy and Germany. The equivalent of the F.B.I., besides an OGPU, might not so long ago have been equally well called the Fascist Ovla and the Nazi Gestapo. Their true ancestor? The Holy Inquisition—which admittedly is dead, but which none the less is still clearly identifiable in certain political move-

ments inspired by the Catholic Church. Catholicism, therefore, even when superficially dwarfed by the proximity of what to many seems to be an urgent, immediate, and terrible danger, should not be whitewashed, minimized, or under-rated. For Catholicism has been, is, and will always remain, the most rabid enemy of mankind.

Apart from the unfortunate implication indicated, this is an outstanding book. It is full of factual information. It is written in a clear, simple, and easy style. It is well produced. It should be read. The more the pity it did not turn out to be a far bigger broadside against the Catholic Church, and thus, by exposing more fully her nefariousness, be used as a more powerful defender of that genuine democracy which all tyrannies hold in opprobrium, but which all lovers of liberty hope might one day bless the society of the future. AVRO MANHATTAN.

“*Dammin’ an’ Blastin’*”

CURRENT secular usage of that kind of impassioned elocution, summarized by spectators and auditors as “*dammin’ an’ blastin’*,” appears to be provoked by those traditional English pursuits which the outer breed knows as “*fishin’, huntin’, an’ shootin’*.” Another vocation, said to have originated in Scotland as *gowf*, is responsible for some verbal flourishes, as addressed to some defective implement; the wily prey; or some material object which hinders the devotee from full success—not to fellow travellers.

The good old days of ecclesiastical “*dammin’ an’ blastin’*” have been allowed to pass into relative obscurity; the ceremonial offices of the Church are not so frequently called in by the impotent State; not even after a “*Final Notice*” has proved unavailing to detach the no-taxpayer from his meagre income. In the said “*good old days*,” the wretch who omitted or refused to pay tithe of his produce to the holy brethren was treated vigorously in every manner. *His* final notice was the act of excommunication—his safety-cord was cut; he was ejected from the clan, tribe, or village; and thence onwards the way of this transgressor was made hard by the priests.

In short, the main economic function of the clerics revolved on the ball bearings of an efficient system of “*dammin’ an’ blastin’*” (one of the holy keys) balanced by the equally effective oration of “*blessin’ an’ breakin’*.” Ernest Crawley compiled an interesting account of ecclesiastical and secular swears,* in which he describes

these typical clerical systems. Omitting modern examples, however, he fails to show the gradual transition from canon law to civil law, whereby the effective impact was transferred from the clerical sergeants to the legal sergeants. The Roman organization of the Curia still claims its “*divine right*” to impose its punishments on all citizens, including those who accept its fiat and those who ignore or reject them as absurd. The medieval period began to reveal results of its own misguided policy, whereby the “*Secular Arm*” was required to do the dirty work specified by the “*Holy Arm*.” Now, in truly civilized countries, the noisy ecclesiastical curse is little more than wind over the heather.

These two weapons are (or were) the Two Keys of Peter and Paul, once truly fearful weapons. Ruling princes who were sceptics could be threatened by overt treasonable propaganda among their “*faithful subjects*,” and this method is used to this day, by Press and Radio and Film, on a constantly retreating front. Modern Roman “*dammin’ an’ blastin’*” is done chiefly by censorship and threats of financial damage.

The Roman corporation is by no means alone in its traditional usage. Their rivals of Byzantium, holding another sadly diminished fort, still brandish fiercely the ancient Curse-wheel, instead of the Tibetan prayer-wheel. This is active in Greece and through the Balkans. Here is an especially juicy sample of the kind hearts of Greek patriarchs.

Miss Durham tells us about their styles of brotherly *blastin’*. The local bishops (*vladikas*) gradually lost effective economic power and

* *Oath, Curse, and Blessing*, by Ernest Crawley. (Thinker’s Library; Watts.)